

ARAB-ISRAELI DEVELOPMENTS THREATEN SHARETT GOVERNMENT

Israeli opinion has been so stirred by the murder of 11 Israelis in the Negev desert on 17 March that extremist elements inside and outside the government are intensifying their pressure on Prime Minister Sharett to take forceful action against the Arab states.

Sharett, a moderate in his dealings with the Arab states, will resist any effort to initiate major hostilities against either Jordan or Syria. He may be compelled, however, to adopt a more warlike posture or face possible resignation if he fails to obtain strong international action against the Arabs.

Sharett has already made some concessions to extremist pressure. He accused Jordan of official responsibility for the massacre on 17 March, even though there is no evidence from what country the murderers came. The abrupt departure on 23 March of the Israeli member of the Israeli-Jordan Mixed Armistice Commission, following this outburst against the American chairman for failure to support Israeli accusations against

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Jordan, reflects the present desperate mood of Israeli circles who see the country increasingly isolated in world affairs.

Imminent American arms aid to Iraq, as well as possible Iraqi participation in the Turkish-Pakistani arrangement, is seen by Israel as strengthening its bitterest enemies. Western coolness toward a UN resolution criticizing Egypt's interference with Israeli-bound shipping through the Suez Canal is viewed as appeasement of the Arabs at Israel's expense. The overthrow of Shishakli in Syria is believed to open the way for an Iraqi-Syrian union, which is probably more feared by Israel than any other political possibility in the area.

The episode of 17 March is seen as an Arab crime proving the futility of Israeli moderation rather than just another incident in the six years of armistice violations by the Arabs. According to the American chargé in Tel Aviv, Israel is basically divided between the policy of forcefully demonstrating its determination to defend itself and the policy of restraint publicly enunciated by Sharett on 16 March.

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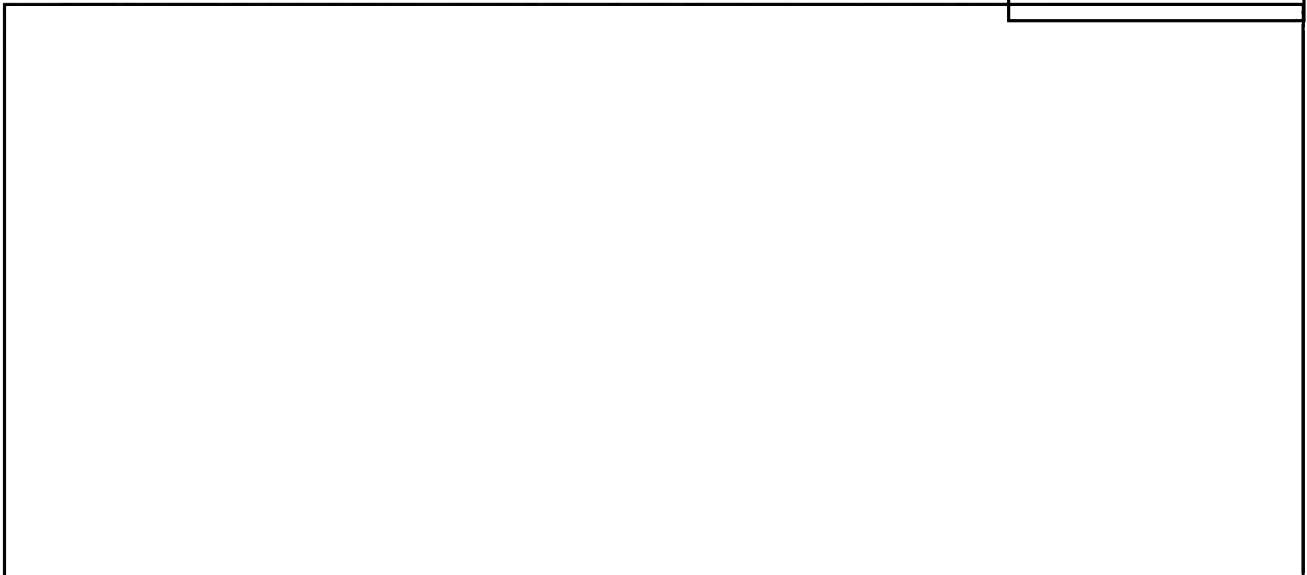
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The split on this question extends into the government.

Minister of Defense Lavon, Chief of Staff Dayan, and ex-prime minister Ben Gurion, who retains strong influence, are encour-

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aged by the popular mood to take forceful action.



In the face of such sentiment, Sharett demands strong American and UN condemnation of Jordan and pressure on Jordan to agree to high-level armistice discussions. Sharett's position with the public and within his own party may be determined by his success or failure in these endeavors.

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On the other hand, if Sharett obtains from the West the kind of support he wants, the Arab states will be further convinced of a pro-Israeli bias in the West. They will be confirmed in their fear of Israeli expansionism and may feel forced to express their hostility to Israel by acts of terrorism and increased economic warfare.

The present dilemma is likely to tax to the utmost the ability of the West to maintain the tenuous armistice arrangements, which would have broken down long ago if the West had

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not continually intervened.

American consul general Tyler in Jerusalem reports that
"the whole area is more tense than at probably any time for
the past three years awaiting the next Israeli move."

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